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ABSTRACT

A summary of recommendations from the recent literature dealing with reading and study skills in high school history and social studies and data from interviews with high school history teachers are presented. The literature search revealed that little teaching of reading and study skills is done in high schools but that history and social studies classes may be logical places for this to occur. Teachers who had done graduate work in history and who had also received advanced training in teaching reading and study skills made the following recommendations: (1) provide materials that are appropriate for the course and the student's reading level; (2) help students understand why they are reading the material; (3) teach students to grasp and retain main ideas and relevant details; (4) help students master special vocabulary, terminology, and concepts in history; (5) help students use textbooks and reference materials effectively; (6) help students learn to read critically; and (7) teach students to use pictorial and graphic aids and materials provided by authors. These recommendations indicate that history teachers who have received training in reading instruction and study skills can suggest specific practices which may be of use to other teachers. (Author/IS)

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SELECTED HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING READING AND STUDY SKILLS NEEDED IN HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: SELECTED HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING READING AND STUDY SKILLS NEEDED IN HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY CLASSES

A summary of recommendations found in a computer search of the recent literature dealing with reading and study skills in history and social studies in high school is presented. Data from interviews with high school history teachers who had done graduate work in history and who had also received advanced training in teaching reading and study skills is analyzed. These teachers made the following recommendations:

A. Provide materials which are appropriate to read for the history course and for the student's reading level.

B. Help students set definite purposes for reading. They should know why they are reading and studying the material.

C. Teach the students to grasp and retain main ideas and relevant details.

D. Help students master special vocabulary, terminology, and concepts in history.

E. Help students use textbooks and reference materials effectively.

F. Help students learn to read critically.

G. Teach students to use pictorial and graphic aids and materials provided by authors. These aids can give a concrete basis for conceptual thinking and learning.

The author feels that his hypothesis, that capable, well qualified, experienced history teachers who had also received advanced training in the teaching of reading and study skills could suggest specific practices or methods which would be helpful to other history teachers in high school, was verified in this particular study with the specific teachers involved.

SELECTED HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER'S SUGGESTIONS
FOR TEACHING READING AND STUDY SKILLS NEEDED
IN HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY CLASSES

The purpose of this study was to determine effective practices or methods that high school history teachers could use to help their students master the skills needed for reading and understanding printed materials in their classes.

It was the author's hypothesis that well educated, experienced teachers who had done graduate work in history and also received advanced training in reading and study skills could suggest specific practices which would be worthy of consideration by other history teachers teaching in high school (grades 9-12).

Significance of the Study

Even today in the mid 1980's reading and study skills are taught only in the elementary grades in most school systems. Such instructional programs generally place emphasis on the reading of narrative or simple factual material, and it is usually terminated at the end of the fourth or fifth grade. Beyond the elementary school level, training in how to read and study is mostly optional and dependent upon the individual teacher's recognition of his/her student's needs (Shepherd, pp. 2-11). For that and other reasons there are many students in high school history clases who have had little, if any, instruction in the reading and study skills needed for effective learning in this content area of the curriculum (Rubin, 1983, pp. 5-11).

Many reading specialists state that it is safe to estimate that at the tenth grade level, in a class where I.Q.'s often range from 85 to 130 and where the average age is 16, there will probably be eight grade levels of reading ability represented in that class. The teacher is confronted with the challenge of teaching these students history often with only one textbook and a limited amount of reference material. Thus, since most learning in secondary history classes is through the use of textbooks, reading and study skills become the "common denominator" of learning in such classrooms (Herber, pp. 13-15). Shepherd points out that many high school students have difficulty in history, not necessarily because they are unable to read, but because they do not have the reading-study skills essential for reading and learning effectively in that content area or any of the major content areas (Shepherd, pp. 147-149).

Definitions and Limitations

There are no unusual terms in this study, but for the sake of clarity the following commonplace ones are defined.

Methods. The term methods is used in this study to describe what the history teacher can do to influence the effectiveness of learning on the part of students, especially the learning of history and reading-study skills in history classes.

High School History Teacher. A person who teaches history in grades 9-12 in a high school.

This article is a summary of a study which was conducted in the spring and fall of 1984 by the author with the help of teachers in Texas, California, Oklahoma, and North Carolina. The study was limited to 117 high school history teachers. The teachers taught in high schools with enrollments from 980 to 2,700 plus. Most of the high schools, 83 percent, were in cities of over 40,000 population. Thirty-three percent of the teachers interviewed were interviewed at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association in Atlanta, Georgia. The other teachers were interviewed in their schools or in their homes. All interviews were done by persons who had completed at least a masters degree and who had completed a course in research procedures. All of the teachers interviewed had taught at least three years. All of them had a masters degree and at least one graduate level course in reading. Thirty-two percent had a masters in history. The others had a combination of graduate work in social studies and education or education, reading and history.

Research Procedures

The research plan used in this study involved the following steps:

1. A computer search of the recent literature dealing with reading and study skills in history and social studies in high school.

2. Extensive use of the ERIC system.

3. A review of the research on reading and study skills

in the content area of the secondary school.

4. Interviews with the 117 history teachers who met the criteria stated above and who were interested in being a part of the study.

Resume of Related Literature

Since this study was concerned primarily with the methods and practices of the selected teachers being studied, only a brief summary of some of the more pertinent research on the topic of reading and study skills needed in the high school history class will be presented here.

As was mentioned above, in many recent studies the point is made that still in a majority of school systems only basal reading instruction is given to most students. Often the instruction in elementary school training in how to read and study in the content areas is mostly dependent upon the individual teacher's recognition of students' needs and the teacher's ability and willingness to meet those needs (Rubin, 1982, pp. 4-6). Many educators state that it is often the student's reading ability which ultimately will be the crucial factor to his success or failure in content classes such as history. Every teacher in every high school history classroom is dealing with materials the student must read and study. This means that the history teacher will have many opportunities to help students who are reading the required printed materials in his/her course (Ratekin et al, pp. 432-436).

In the past many high school history teachers either felt unable to help students in the area of reading and study skills or that it was not their responsibility. Fortunately, many now believe that they can and should help students with the reading and study skills needed in their history classes. They still feel that their primary responsibility is the teaching of history; but they also feel they must help many students with their study skills so that the students can learn history more effectively. In other words instruction in reading and study skills is made an integral part of their teaching (Rubin, 1980, pp. 19-22).

Culp believed that even proficiency in general reading skills was not enough for success in history classes. She pointed out in her recent writings that students needed a specialized vocabulary and special study skills in each of the content areas (Culp, 1979, pp. 27-28). Other reading specialists and experienced teachers have taken the position that to teach content effectively, teachers must be aware of the varying needs and abilities of their students and provide instruction in the reading and study skills which are demanded by the content in history (Rubin, 1983).

Shepherd points out that with few exceptions the history teacher is the best qualified individual for giving reading and study skills instruction in history classes (Shepherd, 1982, pp. 16-18). He feels this is true because through the teacher's interest, preparation, and education he/she is a

specialist in his/her field. It is the history teacher who has acquired the background in the vocabulary, concepts, and generalizations which is necessary for intelligent instruction in this area. The history teacher should be the most capable of helping students learn to pronounce new words, to understand new concepts, to determine the crucial parts of material which require slow, thoughtful reading and those areas which need only skimming or a rapid reading.

The major research studies published in the past ten years dealing with the teaching of reading and study skills in history and the social studies clearly set forth many promising strategies for improving the reading and study skills of students in high school history classes. Listed below are the ones most often mentioned in the publication reviewed for this study:

1. Teach students how to find, understand and retain the major ideas and supporting details in the printed materials used in the study of history.

2. Help students master skills in locating, evaluating, and using information and make certain that reading materials are appropriate for the different reading levels in the history class.

3. Help students build their vocabularies and teach them to use plans such as the SQ3R method. Teach word analysis skills.

4. Show students how to use different parts of the textbook such as the preface, summaries, graphic aids, author's organization and the index.

5. Emphasize the understanding and retention of ideas and concepts encountered when reading history materials by setting definite purposes for reading: for example, reading to answer questions, to find and know specific details, to evaluate a particular issue, or to determine the general significance of an article.

6. Take time to help students acquire an understanding of concepts of time and space, the chronology of eras and events, the relationships between past and present, and cause-effect relationships.

7. Provide differentiated materials and assignments when necessary. If necessary, at times group pupils for special help with reading and study skills.

8. Help students gain knowledge and skill in the use of charts, tables, graphs, maps, globes, and other pictorial or graphic presentations for aid in acquiring an understanding of historical concepts.

9. Help students learn to discriminate between fact and opinion and to choose valid conclusions and make sound inferences and generalizations.

10. Teach students how to weigh the reliability of different statements, make comparisons and contrasts and put an

idea in one's own words without changing the meaning of the printed material.

11. Help students learn to deal with lengthy compound-complex sentences often found in history textbooks whose paragraphs are packed with concepts.

Analysis of the Data from the Interviews

The most important part of this study was the interviews with the 117 history teachers. The author had hoped to interview 125 history teachers who met the criteria stated earlier; however, because of time limitations only 117 teachers were used in this research.

During the course of the interview the teachers were asked to complete a short questionnaire or to take it home with them, complete it and return it to the author by mail. A stamped, self-addressed envelope was provided for those who wanted to complete the questionnaire at home. The analysis of data given below is based on the response of the experienced teachers to two of the eleven questions. The first of these two questions was "Do you feel that it is the responsibility of the high school history teacher to teach students special reading and study skills in the history classroom if it is evident that students need such skills?" Ninety-seven of the experienced teachers said yes to this question. None of the teachers said no to the question but twenty put limitations on their response which indicated some ambivalence on their part. In essence

they were concerned over how much time and effort they could give to study and reading skills since they had so much history content to teach.

The second question considered here was "Would you please take a few minutes and state on the blank page attached to this questionnaire the most effective methods you believe that high school history teachers can use to teach the special reading and study skills needed in their classes?" The teachers were asked to list at least four promising methods, but not to list over seven. The nine approaches most often stated are given below. The exact wording of each response was carefully studied, classified, and then summarized into a statement which would convey the meaning of the various responses even though the verbatim wording of each teacher's statements could not, of course, be given here. Four reading specialists helped the author classify and summarize the responses. Number one was listed the greatest number of times; number two was the next most often stated on through number nine below. The results were as follows:

1. Make in-class and homework assignments very clear and reasonable in length and difficulty.

2. Determine the reading level of your students in history classes and of the textbooks and other printed materials you are using. Provide plenty of materials for students who read below grade level and for those who read on

and above the grade level. Do not let the textbook be the only source of reading materials.

3. Help students learn the special vocabulary and terminology used in the printed history materials. Explain the new vocabulary and concepts introduced in new chapters and units.

4. Teach students the skills needed in locating, using, and evaluating information and materials used to answer questions or to solve research problems in history.

5. Help students acquire an understanding of the relationships between past and present and cause-effect relationships.

6. Early in the school year take time to introduce the history text and provide knowledge of and practice in using the different parts of the book effectively.

7. Help students learn to read for the main ideas, supporting details, different points of view, and to identify the author's organizational plans.

8. Encourage students to read widely on major topics taught in the history courses. Help students become efficient in critical reading by providing practice in identifying bias, prejudice, and propaganda techniques.

9. Teach students to evaluate what they read, to differentiate between factual and editorial writing, and to identify false generalizations and distortions of truth.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey and computer search on recent literature on teaching reading and study skills needed in high school history classes and the results of the interviews with selected history teachers in this study seem to verify the following conclusions:

1. Literature on the topic definitely indicates that the high school history teacher has responsibilities in the area of reading and study skills.

2. The teachers who participated in this study indicated they felt that special reading and study skills in high school history classes should be an area of concern for teachers.

3. The data secured from the interviews indicated that the experienced teachers involved in this study felt that the most effective ways for helping students learn the special reading and study skills needed in high school history classes were essentially the following:

A. Provide materials which are appropriate to read for the history course and for the student's reading level.

B. Help students set definite purposes for reading. They should know why they are reading and studying the material.

C. Teach the students to grasp and retain main ideas and relevant details.

D. Help students master special vocabulary, terminology, and concepts in history.

E. Help students use textbooks and reference materials effectively.

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G. Teach students to use pictorial and graphic aids and materials provided by authors. These aids can give a concrete basis for conceptual thinking and learning.

The author feels that his hypothesis, that capable, well qualified, experienced history teachers who had also received advanced training in the teaching of reading and study skills could suggest specific practices or methods which would be helpful to other history teachers in high school, was verified in this particular study with the specific teachers involved.

The author recommends that further study on this topic be done by experienced teachers using other teachers of history in different geographic areas.

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